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Twin Cities public TV to air 'When Whales Walked,' co- produced with the Smithsonian

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Twin Cities Public Television and the Smithsonian Channel have partnered to produce the [documentary "When Whales Walked: Journeys in Deep Time,"](#) which follows the evolution of elephants, crocodiles, birds, and whales.

The documentary, which airs at 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 19, uses film, graphics, computer-generated imagery, scientific innovation, and unconventional storytelling to follow these four modern-day creatures millions of years into the past to capture how they became the animals they are today.

The idea for the documentary took root 3½ years ago when Michael Rosenfeld, vice president of national productions for TPT, met with Kirk Johnson, the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

The documentary mirrors the fossil exhibit at the museum, which was undergoing a renovation that would change the way people viewed the ancient bones and rock formations.

“Kirk Johnson ... likes to say ‘most fossil halls end in the past, this one ends in the future,’” Rosenfeld said.

Throughout the production process, a film crew was sent to five continents, traveling from Europe to Africa.

The crew was the first to film thousands of fossilized elephant tracks preserved in the Arabian Desert. According to Rosenfeld, elephants originated in Africa, then migrated out to the rest of the world around the time the footprints were formed.

“It’s kind of a snapshot of elephant behavior from seven million years ago,” Rosenfeld said.

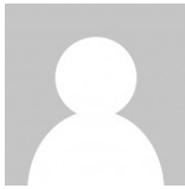
“When Whales Walked,” funded by the National Science Foundation, is supplemented by digital educational materials, such as a virtual reality fossil hunting game in which players experience what it’s like to be a paleontologist by solving a mystery.

But ultimately, “the most inspiring thing really is the way the scientists go about figuring (out the evolution),” Rosenfeld said. “And because of their work we can ... recreate these worlds.”

FYI

- **When:** 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 19
- **Where:** TPT and the Smithsonian Channel
- **Rating:** TV-PG

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